

# The View review

From the Broadlands butler to the crusty bread, **Cassi Kingshott** finds herself quite at home



Photographs by Ian Wilcox

**The White Horse • Market Place • Romsey • Hampshire • SO51 8ZJ  
01794 512431 • www.silkshotels.com**

In the corner of the private dining room stands a stunning life-size horse made from driftwood and created by sculptor Andrew Martin. There are more original art works throughout the public rooms at The White Horse Hotel in Romsey. Situated on the threshold of the New Forest, the beautiful Georgian facade of this stylish hotel conceals a building which dates back to the 14th century.

On arrival we were quietly greeted by Robert Smith, a former butler at Broadlands. All the staff at The White Horse were warm and friendly while, at the same time, polite and very professional. It was a delightful discovery in a world where, increasingly, authentic customer service is becoming a forgotten art.

When we visited it was a wonderfully sunny evening, so what better way to start the evening than with a glass of beautifully chilled, crisp Champagne. Our drinks were accompanied by a little dish of homemade roasted, spiced nuts. It was so difficult not to eat them all and risk spoiling our appetites. The bar interior design is contemporary and yet extremely comfortable. We struck up a conversation with a local couple who had dropped in for a coffee. Having lived in Romsey for many years, they couldn't be more enthusiastic about the sensitive manner in

which the hotel has been redecorated. Many original features have been retained throughout, including some scraps of Tudor wallpaper.

We dined in Silks Brasserie and if we hadn't already guessed, one glance at the menu

**Head chef Dan Gover serves spring pea soup with minted crème fraîche**



assured us we were in for a treat. Produce is sourced locally (within a 10-mile radius) wherever possible and items on the menu included fish from the River Test and aged-Hampshire beef and pork sausages. We chose from the May special menu as seasonal produce is unbeatable. I began with pan-fried fillet of mackerel on watercress and horseradish toast, topped with a poached egg. The mackerel was moist and full of flavour and the toast was deliciously buttery. The bread at Silks is *real* bread with a *proper* crust and a wonderful texture and flavour. My guest chose spring pea soup with minted crème fraîche and fresh granary bread from the breadbasket.

The walls in Silks Brasserie are hung with more original sculptures and stunning paintings of wildlife in muted colours. The decoration overall is stylish and elegant. The Brasserie was busy and so the atmosphere was pleasingly lively. Salvatore Russo, Food and Beverages Manager, was charming and discreet. He obviously runs a tight ship and yet it felt as though his staff were actually enjoying their role. Nothing was too much trouble.

My main course of risotto of sun-dried tomato and roasted artichokes looked simple but was creamy and full of taste. Artichokes can be a little tough and, well, hairy. These were tender and succulent. Nonetheless, I still looked longingly at my companion's poached fillets of plaice resting temptingly on a bed of curly kale. Served with a grapefruit butter sauce it looked delicious. I noticed that I wasn't offered a morsel to taste and I can't blame him one little bit.

The wine we chose was a Chardonnay, which we expected to be perfectly chilled and delicious, and we weren't disappointed.

Pudding – which is definitely the right term here – was, for me, a caramel trio;



**The caramel trio: butterscotch mousse, warm treacle tart and sticky toffee pudding**

butterscotch mousse on a crisp praline biscuit, a tiny portion of warm treacle tart and sticky toffee pudding. I suspect my guest wanted one of everything on the menu but finally selected chocolate and cherry bread and butter pudding. This time he did offer me a spoonful to try and naturally I accepted. What can I say? Almost the perfect end to a perfect evening.

Apart from an elegant demi-tasse of espresso. (Peppermint tea just wouldn't fit the bill here.) Nor were we disappointed that there were no obligatory chocolate mints to accompany our coffee. The meal needed no further enhancement.

Head Chef Dan Gover is accomplished and the menu at Silks is original, and beautifully executed and presented. Dining at Silks feels like a cross between fine dining in a Michelin-star restaurant and a dinner party with friends who also happen to be excellent cooks. I could definitely become accustomed to this way of dining on a daily basis. **V**

**Our meal for two, without drinks, came to £30**

PS...

A final original touch I liked is the range of Silks' own delicatessen items. The chutneys and jams are not only used throughout the menu but also available to purchase individually or in delightful hampers.